

Simple by MelindaCoulson4

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Summary:

A little moment between El and Hopper after the SnowBall Dance. She's a lot more perceptive than he gives her credit for. DadHopper and Jopper thrown into the mix.

Simple

Author's Note:

Wrote this because Hopper and El have captured my heart. It's just the cutest and most pure relationship. Also Jopper is real.

Simple

She's been reserved the whole car ride home. The way she got into the car and stared out the window forlornly made him practically bubbling with anxiety. Maybe she had certain expectations about the SnowBall and it hadn't turned out how she wanted. He wouldn't push her though. That's the way their relationship was. You talked when you wanted to. When you needed that other person you sat at the table and whipped up a triple decker Eggo monstrosity.

So when they step into the cabin and she wraps an arm around his middle, pulling him into a side hug his heart threatens to burst out of his chest. What did the Wheeler kid do to her? He'd drive over there right now and set the kid straight.

"Love," El says.

"What?" He asks. Oh god she's too young to start proclaiming that she's in love with some boy.

"This. Is love?" She asks softly.

His brow furrows. "What...me and you?"

"No...No." she pauses, then motions between the two of them nodding. "Yes love. But.....something different."

"Okay," he comments slowly, trying to understand what she's talking about.

"If someone...," she gives him the side hug again then pulls away to look him in the eye. "Love?"

He still isn't entirely sure what this is all about. They might as well get comfortable. He walks over to the fridge, pulling out a can of beer and a juice box, then sits at the dinner table. "Well yea...you do that when you're supporting someone or comforting them," he answers.

She nods then takes her usual seat across from him. He slides the juice box over to her.

She pokes a hole in the top of the box then takes a long sip, formulating what she's going to say next. He can almost see the wheels turning in her head.

"And laugh. Be together. Worry?"

"Yea those are all a part of loving someone," he tells her. Is she thinking about Mike? Is she trying to figure out if she's in love with him? The protective dad streak is sending off warning signals in his head.

El leans back in her chair and crosses her arms over her chest. She looks so small like that. Sometimes he forgets how young she really is. The wooden chair seems as though it was made for a giant whenever she's on it. "Fighting?" She asks almost hesitantly.

He sighs. "There is fighting sometimes when you love someone. You won't always get along so there will be disagreeing. But there are healthy arguments and then there are bad ones...where you do it all the time...a lot. And that's when it's not love," he says.

"You love...Joyce?" She asks, while her wide brown eyes stare expectantly back at him.

"What?" He sputters, completely shocked.

"You love her?"

"What....where is this coming from?" He shakes his head, blindsided by the question.

"Saw you...at... SnowBall."

"You saw me? At the car....with Joyce?" They had been leaning

against her car, sharing drags of a cigarette. Occasionally whispering words to each other, but mostly just basking in the silence together. Those kids must've been spying on them. They were all supposed to be dancing and having fun why the hell were they seeing what the adults were doing? That dance couldn't have been that boring. El had been talking about it ever since she started living here.

"Yes. Comfort. Support. Joyce," she adds.

God damn it, she's tripped him up. It was true he had held Joyce, but it wasn't like *that*. The moment wasn't meant to be romantic to him or either of them for that matter. She was obviously hurting and processing so he'd given her what she needed.

He rubs a hand over his face, buying him time to come up with something. Their relationship was hard to describe. "It's different with Joyce. She's my very good friend. I love her....as my friend," he finally says.

"Liar."

"What?" He blurts, exasperation marring his features.

"You. Lie," El says incredibly slowly as if he was an idiot who couldn't understand.

"No. No, I don't," he denies.

"Yes." She nods her head, emphasizing the point.

"No," he says with more force behind it this time.

"Yes," she shoots back.

He pauses, tamping down the instinct to deny again. They could go on all night like this, neither one ever wavering. Sometimes arguing with her was like arguing with a wall. Stubborn should be her middle name.

"It's complicated.....alright," he admits. Somehow this little conversation has turned into a an interrogation about his love life. She was too clever, acting all innocent with her questioning. He

should've expected something like this.

He takes a long pull of the beer in front of him. The crisp taste calms him instantly.

"Com-plica-ted?" She sounds the word out like she always does. That pure childlike wonder washes over her features whenever she hears a new word.

"It's when there's a lot of different parts that go into something. So...my relationship with Joyce is complicated," he explains.

"You...Joyce. Laugh, fight, support, happy...Love."

"I....," he pauses before saying anything else because what can he say? She's not wrong per se. He and Joyce do share all of those things but it's just.....complicated.

El abruptly stands from her seat and pads over to the bookcase near the door. She pulls the all too familiar yellow dictionary off of the fifth shelf and sets it down on the table. He's surprised the thing hasn't fallen apart. The spine barely holds the pages all together now after so much wear and tear.

He watches as she opens it up, flipping through the pages. Damn, he would love nothing more right now than to go outside and light up a cigarette. He can feel the familiar itch to hold one between his fingers.

She seems to find the page that she's looking for and begins scanning the words with her pointer finger, brows furrowing in complete concentration. Her finger stops moving and taps the page. Her lips part as she silently reads the definition to herself. Then, she slides the book towards him.

He grabs the book with both hands, squinting at the small font cluttering the pages. The page is open to the 'ser-sir' section.

She moves her finger down the page and points.

Simple (*adj*): 1. easily understood or done; presenting no difficulty.

2. composed of a single element; not compound.

"Simple. Easy. Uncomplicated," she reads the synonyms listed.

He wants to laugh and explain to her how complex adult relationships can be. When you care...deeply about someone everything ends up messy. He wishes he could be as optimistic as her. And truly this display warms his heart, that she cares so much about him to try to understand his relationship with Joyce.

"Yes that's the exact opposite of my relationship with Joyce." He points at the dictionary for emphasis.

"Kiss Joyce. Simple," she says with a shrug of her shoulders.

His jaw drops in response.

He watches as she moves towards the couch and then flops down on it, flipping the TV on as she goes.

"Kid," he calls out to her.

She doesn't respond or acknowledge that he even said anything.

He can't help but chuckle. Sometimes, most of the time actually, she was too smart for her own good.

Maybe she was right.

Author's Note:

Thanks for reading. Leave a comment if you enjoyed
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